

IOWA CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

MAY 2013



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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**MAY IS WETLANDS
MONTH**

Photo by Jennifer Anderson-Cruz

A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



*Jay Mar,
State Conservationist*

Making Conservation Progress

As I visit with our NRCS staff and conservation partners across Iowa, I am truly moved by the conservation ethic and dedication towards "Helping People Help the Land." Let me show you a few examples of how field offices and other staff are rolling out our recently released state priorities: "Technically Accountable People assisting the Public" (TAPP).

Technical: NRCS areas are moving ahead on strategies to build our conservation technical and planning capacities through multi-county training, with a focus on "planning before programs." The Red Oak/Clarinda Management Unit demonstrated the efficiencies of utilizing the R8 surveying instrument and Terrace Design Tool to reduce the amount of time involved in surveying, designing, and construction staking a terrace practice by 80%. The Malvern/Sidney Management Unit highlighted me on progress towards cover crops and organic farming.

Accountable: NRCS areas are developing new strategies to ensure accountability of program contracting through the assessment of an electronic application review process, and program support strategies to ensure proper review of contracts for inclusion and accuracy prior to obligation. We are also restructuring the statewide Quality Assurance Review process to help staff produce quality, efficient programmatic and technical delivery.

People: More training is rolling out that emphasizes the conservation planning and application process. There is a renewed emphasis on the 9 steps of conservation planning, and a "get back to basics" training that emphasizes soil health, cover crops, engineering applications, and economics of conservation. A diversity conference is planned for later this year that reaches out to women landowners with help from our WLL & WFAN partners. We are incorporating a "Bennett Award System" to staff that allows our people know we appreciate their efforts. Lastly, we are emphasizing inclusion of our conservation partners in training and delivery, to build their capacities to assist.

Public: We want to increase the amount of public information and tools available to inform and educate the public about conservation. This includes our new statewide website, and further utilizing Social Media, such as YouTube and

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Current Developments Stories and Photos

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Crowell at laura.crowell@ia.usda.gov.

Past issues can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/ia/people/employees/?cid=nrcs142p2_008273



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Diversity Day: 2013

USDA's 2013 Diversity Day on March 13 focused on its role in expanding agricultural opportunities for all Veterans.

Former Iowa Congressman Leonard Boswell began the event by telling a small live audience of about 25 – and hundreds watching via live Net Meeting – about his experiences as a Veteran and also serving the public for many years.

Veteran Sonia Kendrick then presented information about her non-profit organization, Feed Iowa First. The group's mission is to provide fresh fruit and vegetables to Iowa's food banks and to aid in qualifying beginning landless vegetable farmers to access beginning farmer loans.

"I believe the next generation of farmers actually lives in the cities and is landless," Kendrick said. "We need to find a way to bring them out of the city and get them onto the ground. Iowa imports almost 90 percent of our food, and because of this it ties the cost of our food directly to the price of fuel which will continue to increase in the future."

The final Diversity Day Speaker, Mike Simester, is a farmer in Muscatine County. Simester was diagnosed with PTSD after being injured in Iraq in 2003 while serving the U.S. Army. When he returned to Iowa following his injury recovery, he worked as a paralegal for a short time before realizing he would not be able to perform duties at the level he expected from himself.



USDA's 2013 Diversity Day featured speakers Leonard Boswell (left), Sonia Kendrick (middle), and Mike Simester. The threesome talked about expanding agricultural opportunities for Veterans.

"I spent a lot of time staying inside away from people and I knew this was not good for my physical or mental well-being," Simester said.

One of the first steps for Simester was working with the Easter Seals Iowa and their Rural Solutions program which provides on-site rehabilitation services to veterans with disabilities and their families who are engaged in, or aspire to pursue, a career in agriculture.

In January 2010, Simester and his wife Trish sold their house in Muscatine and moved to a 10-acre farm outside of town. On their farm they grow a wide variety of fruits and vegetables and raise chickens, geese, ducks and goats.

One of the key pieces of equipment on the Simester farm is a compact tractor that is used nearly every day.

The Rural Solutions program helped make many modifications to this tractor possible including a hand-operated cruise control system, a quick hitch system that lets Simester hook up the power take off (PTO) without dismounting the tractor, side steps for easier mounting, an enclosure when working in colder temperatures, and a modified seat that provides more body support and stability when traveling over rough ground.

Along with modifications to his tractor, Easter Seals also helped Simester identify accommodations that would help him to be fully and safely engaged in his operation, including a self-propelled garden cart and a scooter that allows him to lean over and pick things up while remaining seated.

Conservation Education: Celebrating Soil & Water Conservation Week

Many NRCS offices and Conservation Districts celebrated Soil & Water Conservation Week April 28-May 5 with community activities. At right, Boone River and Lyons Creek MRBI Coordinator Bruce Voigts demonstrates how little runoff is created with a combination of crop residue and cover crops. Below, Adair County District Conservationist Al Lange talks to area fifth graders about the history of the Iowa landscape and why there is so much less good topsoil that there once was. Bottom right, Adair County Soil Conservationist Amanda McNees shows fifth graders soil profiles. She explained how every soil is different and needs to be treated that way.



Video Spotlight: New Farmers & Women Land-owners

This issue's video comes from the Drake Agricultural Law Center. Former beginning farmers provide advice about talking to landowners, securing beneficial lease arrangements, and utilizing niche markets and custom farming.



SCT Gary Fedler: Lee County PF Conservationist of the Year

Fort Madison - Each year Lee County Pheasants Forever (PF) recognizes individuals for their conservation efforts. Lee County PF presented NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Gary Fedler with the 2013 Conservationist of the Year Award at its 26th annual banquet earlier this year. This award is given annually to individuals or organizations that represent the PF mission and are dedicated to promoting wildlife habitat.

According to the PF news release, Fedler not only promotes conservation at the local NRCS Office in Donnellson, but also, more recently, established conservation practices on his entire farm that reduced soil erosion while benefitting water quality and wildlife habitat.

Over the last five years on his farm in Franklin township, Fedler has converted the majority of his row crop acres to native grass plantings for the benefit of upland birds; specifically pheasants and quail. Using CRP for the conversion, Gary has planted both short and tall native grasses, installed food plots, and complimented his field boundaries with legumes and cool season grasses that serve as firebreaks and wildlife corridors.



Lee County Pheasants Forever honored NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Gary Fedler (right) with its "Conservationist of the Year Award" at its banquet earlier this year. Rick Tebbs with Lee County PF presented the award to Fedler.

"What Gary has done is an exceptional example of what it means to dedicate yourself to the Pheasants Forever habitat mission," said Brad Willson, Lee County Pheasants Forever President.

Northwest Iowa No-Till: Cover Crops Big Topic

About 170 people attended the 2013 Northwest Iowa No-Till/Strip-Till Conference at the Moville Community Center on March 15.

Dan Paulsen, area resource conservationist in Sioux City, says there were many positive comments. "There was a great discussion about cover crops, as well as no-till topics," he said.

The conference featured speakers such as no-till farmer Barry Kusel of Manning and Paul Jasa, an ag engineer from the University of Nebraska, who covered "No-Tilling in Heavy Residue."



Several panel speakers covered no-till and manure and no-till in corn-on-corn rotations. Sarah Carlson from Practical Farmers of Iowa covered "Cover Crop Management."

NRCS Recruiting: FFA State Leadership Conference in Ames

Submitted by Greg Townley, District Conservationist in Malcom

The Iowa FFA State Leadership Conference held in Ames on April 22-23 brought together nearly 5,000 high school and college students and guests from across the state to hold elections, listen to top speakers, receive awards for work completed in projects over the past year, and compete for prizes and scholarships in livestock and soil judging and other topics that make them marketable in the agriculture industry. What better place to go to recruit top students for employment with NRCS?

Helen Leavenworth (Soil Conservationist in Jefferson), Clint Miller (District Conservationist in Carroll), and Greg Townley (District Conservationist in Malcom and Special Emphasis Program Manager for Asian American/ Pacific Islanders), attended the convention and set up a recruiting booth. Numerous potential employees stopped at the booth and picked up information about careers in NRCS.

A great benefit of setting up a recruiting booth at the FFA Convention was the presence of such a large number of potential employees who are at the point in their life where they are making decisions about career choices and about what courses to take in college. Since many of the NRCS positions require specific types of courses, this was a great opportunity to show the FFA students the exact type of courses that are needed to qualify. It was also a great opportunity to recruit Earth Team Volunteers who can assist NRCS



staff with projects while developing a greater understanding of the role of NRCS.

The booth served as a great outreach to students coming from many backgrounds. Although many of the FFA members live on farms, there are also many who have no exposure to agriculture. It was also a great opportunity to show that NRCS seeks to hire employees from diverse backgrounds as well as diverse cultures. One way to show this diversity was by displaying the Asian American/Pacific Islander poster which highlights the month of May as AA/PI Heritage Month.

Another highlight at the booth was a display of the Iowa NRCS website and playing of videos about Soil



Top: Clint Miller (left) and Greg Townley talk to FFA Students from Knoxville, Iowa, at the Iowa FFA Leadership Conference in Ames, Iowa on April 23, 2013. Above: Helen Leavenworth and Greg Townley tell the NRCS mission to prospective employees.

Health which provided soil health education to students as they learned about NRCS employment opportunities.

Orange Connection: Wartburg Students Job Shadow in Warren Co.

The NRCS Field Office in Indianola hosted Wartburg College (Waverly) students for a two-day job shadowing experience through the College's "Orange Connection" program.

Abby Blake is a second-year Biology student from Minnesota looking to double major in Environmental Studies. Therin Bradshaw is a second-year student from Illinois with a minor in Environmental Studies.

The Orange Connection is a short-term opportunity for Wartburg students to explore career interests. Students who excel in academics, leadership, and volunteer activities stay with families and are given an opportunity to job shadow in an area of interest.



Public Affairs Tips: Communicating with Non-Technical Audiences

Whether you're talking on the phone or giving a formal presentation, technical information should be simplified for your audience. Sometimes when we are experts we forget that our audience is coming from an entirely different perspective and may need some context to understand what we're talking about. Consider some of the tips below to help your message ring loud and clear:

» Understand your audience and purpose

Before your next presentation, think about who you are speaking to and what information they're looking for. Understanding what they want will help you gear your message to address their needs.

Also consider your ultimate goal and purpose of the task. What do you ultimately hope to achieve - are you just imparting information, are you asking for support, or are you looking for a decision or action?

» Avoid using too much detail and speak in plain language

Usually, 100 well-chosen words will make the point better than 2,000 words covering every detail. Convey your point using short sentences and every day English.

» Spend more time on "why"

Try to spend less time on the technical details of a particular solution and spend more time on the benefits to your audience. Someone trying to buy a car would find a car review more useful if it avoids extensively explaining the features and details and instead directly addresses whether the car is a good buy or a lemon.

» Eliminate or define jargon and acronyms

Use terms the audience will understand rather than jargon and acronyms. If it can't be avoided, define jargon and acronyms up front.

» Avoid large words and too many numbers

Though many scientists and engineers often use long words and complicated sentences to convey the complex ideas they work with, research shows that most people find shorter words and more straightforward sentences easier to understand. Don't overwhelm the audience with too many numbers. Focus on the numbers that matter the most.

» Use examples, visual explanations, and stories to convey information

Avoid the abstract. People have a difficult time conceptualizing large numbers. Instead, try to provide real-world examples to help them understand, like 35 football fields instead of 12,600 feet. Try creating a chart or table to visually display your information. Graphs and charts work well for helping the audience understand what you're speaking about.

March Potluck Madness: Women's History/Irish American Heritage

Employees at the Poweshiek County USDA Service Center celebrated Women's History Month and Irish American Heritage Month by having a potluck lunch on March 14.

In addition to enjoying Irish food and other American food with a touch of green, they learned about women who have initiated change. Some notable ones include Molly Pitcher, The Unsinkable Molly (Margaret) Brown, Sharon Christa Corrigan McAuliffe, Nancy Corrigan, Mary Harris (Mother) Jones, Anne Sullivan Macy, Margaret Mitchell, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Catherine McCarthy (jolly Irishwoman of the Lower East Side and mother of Billy the Kid), Annie Moore, Nellie Bly, Kate Smith, Eliza Marie Gillespie, Sister Julie McGroarty, Nellie Taylor Ross, and Maureen Connolly. (www.irishamericanheritage.com)

Potluck participants learned about the beginning of Women's Day (March 8, 1857) when women working in clothing and textile

factories in New York City staged a protest. Women also marched for a better work environment on March 8, 1908, with the slogan "Bread and Roses," with bread symbolizing economic security.

An International Women's Day was first celebrated on March 19, 1911. Russian women first observed International Women's Day in 1913 on the last Sunday in February, and in 1917, on the last Sunday in February, decided to strike for "bread and peace."

Staff also learned that 12 of the heroes who defended and died at the Alamo were of Irish ancestry, including Davey Crockett, Jim Bowie, and Bill Travis. Also, Henry



Ford was the son of Irish immigrants, and Margaret Mitchell wrote "Gone with the Wind" which was about an Irish immigrant family in the Civil War.

The password of George Washington's troops in Boston on 3-17-1776 was "St. Patrick." The Declaration of Independence had 8 original signers who were of Irish descent. Finally, the first celebration of St. Patrick's Day was in St. Louis, MO in 1820.

HR Corner

Looking for financial resources? Here is some information and tools

to assist you with planning for your future. You may access this information via the Human Resources Sharepoint at: <http://tinyurl.com/c2todxv>. If you have questions, call Iowa NRCS Human Resources at 515-284-4587.

Fayette County: Snail Site Visit

Biologist Jennifer Anderson-Cruz took this shot of (l-r) District Conservationist Aaron Anderson, Michael Coffey of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and NRCS Biologist James Cronin during the Fayette County Algific Slope/Iowa Pleistocene Snail site visit in February.



Partner News: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Woodland Plants Can Improve Stream Quality this Spring

Newly sprouted plants are adding splashes of color to Iowa's woodlands. Research from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture reveals that these understory plants have an important role to play in protecting water quality.

Michaeleen Gerken, a Ph.D. candidate at Iowa State University, has compiled a list of common woodland plants to guide Iowans interested in restoring function and quality to the landscape, available on the Leopold Center website.

Gerken works with Jan Thompson, ISU Natural Resource Ecology and Management, who leads a competitive grant project in the Leopold Center's Ecology Initiative. The investigators collected data from nine locations across Iowa to examine how woodland plant communities influence sediment and nutrient runoff.

The researchers found that intact forests had more native species and higher-quality specialist species compared to forests degraded by human use. Degraded forests and woodlands, with less understory cover throughout the year and fewer roots in the ground, tended to deliver more nitrogen to streams.

That means landowners can work to improve water quality by planting or encouraging native woodland plants. Gerken's list gives information about the characteristics and needs of various species,

such as spring beauties, violets, bluebells, goldenrods and sedges.

Certain species perform better than others, according to the research. Gerken found that wild ginger, Virginia waterleaf, hispid buttercup and Virginia bluebells are easy to establish and particularly effective for capturing and storing nutrients. She plans to study mayapple, false rue anemone, and James' sedge, plants with great potential for woodland restoration.

"All of these plants are up early in the spring and most have pretty spring flowers or attractive foliage," Gerken said.

You can find the list of woodland plants, as well as a fact sheet about the project, online at www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs. Look for "Species for Iowa Woodland Planting and Restoration" and "Linking Forest Communities and Water Quality."

Support for the project comes from the Leopold Center, ISU Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management, University of Iowa Center for Global and Regional Environmental Research, U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Department of Agriculture McIntire-Stennis Program.

New Research Results

Summaries results from five recently completed research projects are now available from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture:

1. Researchers worked with Latino youth to explore community food systems and the cultural meaning of food, and created a training program and curriculum for other teachers to use.
2. Another project developed a free, online Transplant Production Decision Tool to help local vegetable producers scale-up their operations. The tool includes case studies of seven Midwest farms.
3. Researchers grew a pawpaw patch in Louisa County and harvested the fruit to practice different techniques in pulp separation and preservation. A mechanical pulper successfully separated seed and skin from the pulp, which could be frozen for later use.
4. A two-year experiment compared mob grazing to rotational and strip grazing, examining animal performance, changes in botanical composition, plant nutrition and soil characteristics.
5. A summary also is available for the first three years of work in the ongoing Landscape Biomass research project. The project compares the yield, profitability and environmental performance of a variety of biomass cropping systems in central Iowa, including rotations of corn, soybean, sweet sorghum, triticale, switchgrass, and/or aspen trees.

Changes In: NRCS Personnel

In order of Effective Date

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
Dake, Bruce	Engineering Technician	Reassignment	3/24/13	Creston Engineering
Fillian, Robert	Engineering Technician	Reassignment	3/24/13	Creston Engineering
Yutz, John	Engineering Technician	Reassignment	3/30/13	Garner FO
Kragel, Jackie	Soil Conservation Tech.	Career Conditional Hire	4/7/13	Wapello FO
Wilson, Meghan	Management Analyst	Temporary Detail from HQ	4/15/13	Adel FO
Boyland, Erika	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	4/21/13	Bakersfield, CA
Giombi, Holly	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	4/21/13	Newton FO
Hubbert, Jon	Acting Chief of Staff	Temporary Promotion	4/21/13	Washington D.C.
Peek, Jody	Soil Conservationist	Reassignment	4/21/13	Creston FO
Wingenbach, Andy	Acting ASTC (O)	Temporary Detail from N. Dakota	4/30/13	State Office - Des Moines
Woods, James	Soil Conservation Tech.	Retirement	4/30/13	Osceola FO
Johnston, Steven	District Conservationist	Retirement	5/3/13	Williamsburg FO
Manternach, Steven	Resource Conservationist	Retirement	5/3/13	State Office - Des Moines
White, Lee	State Construction Engineer	Retirement	5/3/13	State Office - Des Moines

Changes In: DSC Personnel

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Effective Date	Location
O'Riley, Sheila	Secretary	Retirement	3/29/13	Adams SWCD
Mobley, Glee	Soil Technician	Retirement	4/11/13	Ringgold SWCD
Lemke, Dean	Natural Resources Engineer Supervisor	Retirement	4/30/13	DSC Central Office

Save the Date

Iowa NRCS Golf Tournament
Friday, August 23, 9:00 a.m.
Copper Creek Golf Course
Pleasant Hill, Iowa

More details to come...

Contact Jason Johnson at jason.r.johnson@ia.usda.gov with questions

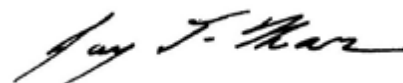


State Conservationist Jay Mar Cont...

Twitter, to enhance our message. The national soil health campaign, "Unlock the Secrets In the Soil," has been a huge success so far, reaching out to farmers and related audiences about practices such as cover crops, no-till, and responsible nutrient applications. Iowa staff created the "Whobuddies Adventure" comic series, which just released its third book. The series educates young people about the importance of protecting our natural resources. NRCS staff across the state help our education outreach

efforts with newsletters highlighting conservation work and tours with our conservation partners.

Since we recently celebrated Soil and Water Conservation Week and Earth Day, it is truly fitting to celebrate your efforts to support conservation and stewardship. I am very proud of all of you, and encourage your continued accomplishments in conservation.



Life, actually.



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USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Soil is an amazing living and life-giving ecosystem. In fact, the more we learn, the more we realize how the soil's health affects every living thing above it.

Learn more about the basics and benefits of soil health—and join our nation's farmers and ranchers as they work to "Unlock the Secrets in the Soil." Because it's not just about the soil. It's about life, actually.